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*Introductory Addresses on the Science and Art Department
and the South Kensington Museum.*

No. 5.



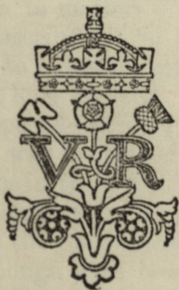
ON

THE MUSEUM OF ART.

By J. C. ROBINSON, F.S.A.,

KEEPER OF THE MUSEUM OF ART, AND OF THE ART LIBRARY.

(Delivered 14th Dec. 1857.)



LONDON:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY,

AGENTS TO THE SCIENCE AND ART DEPARTMENT OF THE
COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL ON EDUCATION

1858.

[*Price One Penny.*]

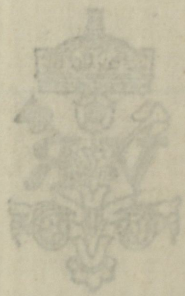
Introduction of the Science and Art Department
and the Board of Directors

THE MUSEUM OF ART.

BY J. C. ROBINSON, F.R.S.

SECRETARY OF THE MUSEUM OF ART, AND OF THE ART LIBRARY.

(Dedicated 14th Dec 1857.)



LONDON:

CHAPEMAN AND HALL, 103, PICCADILLY.

AGENTS TO THE MUSEUM AND ART LIBRARY OF THE
COMMISSIONER OF WORKS AND BUILDINGS

1857

[Printed One Penny]

AN ADDRESS,

&c. &c.

As the memorable Exhibition of 1851 drew towards its close, and the completeness of its success became apparent, the desire that some permanent institution of an analogous nature should be established was very generally entertained. While justly proud of our country's preeminence in industrial pursuits, it was yet felt that in one particular, namely, in industrial design, we were outstripped by our neighbours. Some accounted for this inferiority on the old hypothesis of the natural inaptitude of Englishmen in matters of art, while others, with more truth, ascribed it to the want of those aids and appliances to industrial art-education, which other countries had long enjoyed.

As to our supposed natural inaptitude, this hackneyed opinion was no longer to be endured; a thousand indications in the Exhibition itself pointed to a contrary conclusion; and in particular it could not be denied, that the preeminent arts of painting and sculpture, although with less of academic aid, flourished as in no ungenial soil, nay even gave evidence of distinctive originality, and a healthy exemption from traditional influences, manifested in no other country. But hitherto painting and sculpture had alone been deemed worthy of serious national regard; schools of design had not flourished, mainly because it was impossible to make people believe that the high and abstract art of their imaginations could have any thing in common with

manufactures, or the every-day concerns of life. Our manufacturers and workmen never realised the fact that art could be their practical concern, until 1851 opened their eyes and aroused at once their sympathies and their fears.

Then practical England found out that her nearest neighbour and most formidable industrial rival, France, had made this discovery at least a century ago, and in the superior art-power displayed in the French contributions to the Exhibition, recognised the results of a hundred years national encouragement of the study of industrial design. The true cause of our relative inferiority was thus evident, and that we were not utterly beaten in this unequal competition was matter for congratulation. Instead of being disheartened, therefore, the general feeling was that of the necessity for redeeming lost time by redoubled activity ; and schools and museums of art were felt to be the objects towards which the material resources, as well as the moral influences resulting from the Exhibition, might with especial propriety be directed. The Government Schools of Design, although their action had been languid and irregular, had already exercised an appreciable influence on industrial art ; they were, however, experiments only, on a most limited scale : but now something far more extensive and practical was desired. The education of the industrial artist, moreover, was not all,—manufacturers complained that their exceptional productions from the designs of eminent artists found but little favour with the general public, who perversely preferred the worthless designs they were accustomed to, and it thus also became evident that the education of the public at large in matters of taste was as essential as that of the artist. School teaching here was inapplicable, or, at any rate, it could only reach the rising generation, and the gradual but sure influence of museums was the only other means. The Exhibition of 1851 itself was a museum, of necessity limited in its

teaching functions from representing only the art of the present day ; and yet if on this restricted footing its influence had been so remarkable, what might not be expected from a permanent institution, on the widest and most liberal basis, comprising specimens of all periods and countries, specially directed and arranged with a view to the promotion of taste in ornamental or industrial art ? Such an institution it was determined to found.

An application to Government for funds for the purchase of specimens from the Exhibition was immediately responded to, the sum of 5,000*l.* being granted, and a commission intrusted with its expenditure.

The nucleus of a museum was in this manner speedily got together, and its further development was appropriately intrusted to the new Government Department which had been established for the better administration of the Schools of Design.

Although its ultimate object was a perfectly definite one, the exact nature of the institution to be created was not so clearly conceived at the outset, and it will not be out of place to briefly specify the manner in which a purely industrial collection, in fact a colossal bazaar of modern manufactures, such as the Exhibition of 1851, was made subservient to the establishment of a collection like the present, differing in so many essential respects from it. The acquisition of a number of the finest specimens in design in the several sections of the Exhibition was obviously the first step to be taken ; it was thought that such a selection would, in the first place, be of practical use in furnishing proper models for study, and, in the next, that it would constitute a valuable historical record of the standing of art in alliance with industry at an epoch likely to remain for ever remarkable. Now, as regards the former object, the judgment of competent persons was not very favourable to modern industrial art. Very little originality

or real merit was perceptible in any of the European contributions, and, consequently, in an educational point of view, they could be of but little value ; but in the oriental division, in which the qualification of *modern* must be considered rather nominal than essential, the case was different : for the first time the paramount merit of eastern design was universally acknowledged. The East, where every form and motive in design has a traditional and prescriptive permanency, where the patterns of the textile stuffs of India, the lacquered work and enamels of Persia, the painted porcelain of China and Japan, have remained in fashion for a thousand years unchanged, and ever popular,—the East was, by common consent, allowed to be still our mistress in industrial design, and so this admiration of oriental works was in reality a tacit homage to antiquity, to the art of former times. Thus, the Exhibition itself, though virtually a gathering of exclusively modern productions, afforded the strongest evidence that, in an educational point of view, the study of precedent art was of primary importance.

This conviction seems to have forced itself on the members of the commission intrusted to make the selections, inasmuch as the objects chosen from the oriental side of the Exhibition (chiefly from Hindustan) actually exceeded in number those from all the European nations. Nevertheless, such was the prestige of the Exhibition, that long after the installation of the new Museum at Marlborough House, it was regarded by the public merely as a continuation of that undertaking on a reduced scale, and subsequent additions to the collection, which for a considerable period were made almost exclusively in the category of ancient European art, were at first regarded almost as unwarrantable innovations on its supposed object.

We will not at this moment go further into detail respecting the nature of the collection already

acquired, nor the method of classification adopted : we shall return to these subjects again. It may be generally stated, that during the six years that have since elapsed, the Museum has advanced concurrently with the other branches of the Science and Art Department, and has now attained to the proportions of a great national collection. From what has been already stated respecting its origin, it will be evident that from the outset this Museum had a different and more methodic direction than most national collections, which in the beginning have been generally more or less fortuitous gatherings of things rare and curious, only assuming more definite character after long periods of time ; whilst it is equally obvious that practical utility in an educational point of view is its most important function.

It may here indeed be objected that museums will always be rather places to which to pay holiday visits, when relaxation and the pleasurable influence of curious novelties will be more thought about than any definite instruction the objects may be capable of conveying. It will, therefore, be well to inquire in what way collections of works of art can be made to exercise special educational influences, and in what respect the constitution of the present institution is in advance of others.

Beginning then with negative testimony :—in almost every country museums are too much surrounded by a sort of exclusive repellent atmosphere. People visit them with the feeling of being admitted on sufferance ; the very want of sympathy with the ignorance of the general public, shewn in the absence of any provision for their special instruction, being construed as an indirect intimation that such establishments are not intended for them, and that they are, on the contrary, to be regarded as costly foundations for the abstract encouragement of knowledge, meant only for the use and benefit of a favoured few.

It may be true that the imaginary prestige thus created, even though it be the merest sham and delusion, is of some benefit to the cause of learning and science in the abstract; inasmuch as uneducated persons admire and respect much more that which is exalted, and apparently beyond their sphere of comprehension, than that which, being brought down to their own level, loses this charm of dignified mystery; while, at the same time, it may be urged that in endeavours at popular explanatory illustration there is danger of imparting only that little knowledge which is a dangerous thing.

But the two influences of museums here hinted at are compatible with each other. To elucidate and explain a work of art down even to the capacity of a child is not necessarily to vulgarise it. The refined connoisseur may enjoy the choicest specimen none the less because it is made the vehicle of instruction to the unlearned, while, whatever may be the effect on the irretrievably ignorant, it may be safely asserted, that if the general public are inclined to reverence that which being truly noteworthy they yet do not understand, their respect will not be lessened when they do.

Generally speaking, in all public collections the following points are, in an instructional aspect, of vital importance:—First, a well-ordered division of the collection into classes, in each of which methodical series of specimens should be got together, shewing their historical or chronological and technical development; while in addition casts, drawings, engravings, and photographs, of remarkable analogous specimens in foreign or private collections, or of complete monuments or objects *in situ*, of which the specimens in the collection may be fragments or details, should be arranged together with them. Every specimen, also, should be accompanied by a label-card amply yet succinctly describing it.

Catalogues full and complete, and also judiciously abridged, should be prepared, accompanied by historical and descriptive essays, and illustrated by engravings; by these aids each section of the collection would be as it were a standing treatise, designed to allure and lead on the observer to the methodic study of the subject; and the most indifferent visitor would perforce be taught something.

In the next place the collection should be fully accessible to all without distinction, every day, as early and as late as possible; this as a matter of public right, remembering that the slightest impediment thrown in the way of the visitor, anything in short which gives to admission the aspect of a favour conferred, is striking at the root of all success. Students and others should be afforded all possible facilities for copying, under regulations involving no unnecessary forms of application or delay; and finally, every object susceptible or worthy of it should be reproduced by moulding, the electrotpe process, photography, or engraving, and be made available to the public at a minimum price.

A glance at the converse picture, which too generally prevails at present both at home and abroad, will serve to put these desiderata in a clearer light. Collections irregularly developed, rich in one direction as opportunity or personal bias may have brought about, meagre or absolutely wanting in specimens of other classes of equal importance; objects of the most heterogeneous nature grouped together for mere convenience of display; descriptive labels either entirely wanting or only partially affixed at haphazard to perhaps insignificant objects, whilst others of far higher interest are left unnoticed. No catalogue, or it may be one twenty years old, entirely out of date and superseded, while the numbers on the objects are at variance with those in the book. No attempt at collateral illustration, — the getting of casts or photographs, a matter of high favour only to be obtained by great

influence and long negotiation ; admission so hedged about with difficulties, open one day, closed the next ; to-day free, to-morrow on sufferance, as if the object were to deter rather than invite the visitor. And it is then evident why museums are either mere lounging places for the idle crowd, or kept up for the sole benefit of the refined connoisseur or the scientific few. The former or popular condition of museums is clearly the only one which modern enlightenment will henceforth be inclined to sanction, and however much a sentimental respect for old ways and merely curious connoisseurship may retard those changes in the administration of museums that in almost every country are being loudly called for, it may safely be predicted that in England, at least, the national good sense will insist on every institution supported by the public funds being made to yield an adequate amount of definite instruction to the public in general.

There are some other objections to the popularising of public museums, which before proceeding to describe our collection in detail, it will be desirable to answer. It is often asked, "After all, what practical result is expected to follow from such popular collections?" And it is argued that designers and workmen are more likely to make a wrong than a right use of the beautiful objects set before them ; that is to say, they will, at best, simply imitate without a due power of selection, and thus the pedantic eclecticism which already prevails will be still more strongly confirmed. Again, it is objected that the producers of the beautiful original works we now collect and admire had no museums to go to in search of inspiration ; that the old goldsmiths of Florence or Augsburg, the majolica painters, enamellers, wood-carvers, and glass painters, had no such methodic collections to refer to as it is now proposed to form ; and that if the minor arts are to have any true development in this country, it must be from the same innate and original genius

which was the sole mover of old, and which now in a great measure alone animates our painters and sculptors.

These arguments, however, although specious enough at first sight, involve fallacies which it will be no difficult task to unmask, though to follow them out in all their bearings would be beyond the limits of a lecture.

In the first place, then, it is not true that the old artists received no assistance from collections of works of art, and an inquiry into the social condition and method of training of art-workmen in former times would doubtless reveal a state of matters, as regards instructional facilities, entirely to the advantage of the ancient artist.

Although museums, properly speaking, can scarcely be said to have been formed in modern times before the 17th century, collections virtually deserving of the name existed in great numbers from a much earlier period. In the middle ages, every abbey and cathedral, indeed almost every parish church had its treasury, in which the most exquisite works of art were preserved to an extent of which we can now form but an imperfect estimate, from the diminished contents of the few that remain after centuries of spoliation. Rich men, moreover, of every degree invested their wealth in costly objects in the precious metals, as the only means of investment offering a prospect of prompt realisation. Bullion and precious gems then formed the only real medium of value, and the habits of personal display and pomp of pageantry, so passionate a characteristic of the middle ages, irresistibly prompted the possessors of wealth to display it in the most effective and dazzling manner. Rich cups and salvers, hanaps, coffrets, ewers, jewellery, every object of use or luxury in fact on which the precious metals and gems could be lavished, which would otherwise have lain idle and useless as in their native mines, were accumulated by nobles

and princes in an abundance that their descendants at the present day would never dream of rivalling. It will not perhaps be out of place to state, in confirmation of this, that, at the present time, the richest collection in Europe of works analogous to those we are now endeavouring to collect is actually an ancient royal treasury; the almost inestimable riches of the green vaults at Dresden still occupy the same ancient locality, and are in fact the accumulated hoards of the earlier princes of the royal house of Saxony. By an easy and natural transition the treasuries both of the laity and the church became the repositories of every rare and curious, and consequently precious, object,—an ostrich's egg, a cocoa-nut, a nautilus shell, or a specimen of Chinese porcelain, an elephant's tusk, or a narwal horn, to say nothing of saintly relics innumerable, things little thought of now, were then curiosities of great actual value, and were immediately mounted and adorned in the most exquisite taste with the most precious materials, presented as offerings at some famous shrine, or deposited in the iron-bound chests of potent seigneurs, to be displayed on state occasions to their curious guests or dependants.

Thus connoisseurship, or the taste for collecting, prevailed as strongly in the middle ages as at present, while there can be no doubt but that artisans and the people generally found little difficulty in gaining access to these collections. The church treasuries, we know, were then as now standing exhibitions, accessible alike to the devotee and to the merely curious visitor.

We need but allude to the storied walls of churches and public buildings, to the painted windows, glowing with saintly histories and the richest ornaments; to the armies of statues and innumerable reliefs which adorned the noble edifices of the middle ages: these edifices are still the best museums of high art. How far more powerful must their influence have been when in their first blaze of

freshness, complete, where now we find but faded and mouldering remains !

Virtually, then, the influence of collections of works of art in former times was tantamount to any now likely to result from public museums ; and the formation and development of the latter, as the only available substitutes for these ancient treasures, have therefore become a practical necessity.

Modern mechanical contrivances and the division of labour, moreover, have tended to deaden the taste and intelligence of the artisan, by narrowing the field for their exercise, whilst the exigencies of mechanical processes, and other economical reasons, have imposed fresh restraints on the designer ; but these again are strong reasons for the extension of instructional facilities. Moreover, the modern artisan, being virtually debarred from obtaining that distinction which is the meed of recognised personal talent, is now less than ever likely to spend his hours of relaxation in the acquisition of knowledge which, though certain to be of great eventual benefit to him, involves additional and present exertion, while it brings no immediate profit or consideration. Thus, again, the means of study and self-improvement must be brought home to the artisan, or he will scarcely go out of his way to obtain them. And as respects uneducated students making a wrong use of the treasures got together for their instruction, even the power of mere lifeless imitation, which is so much dreaded, can scarcely be acquired without a great amount of valuable historical and technical information accruing at the same time. But on this score it may be roundly said, that the man of dull parts, whatever be his previous training, will in all probability always be an imitator, while the taste and judgment of the gifted student will be chastened and refined, not unduly warped, by the influence of good models. It is an indisputable truth that the ignorant or the so-styled

self-instructed artist is always the least original. In short, there is nothing to fear and every thing to hope from the influence of well-chosen and well-arranged Art collections.

Having now pleaded for museums in general as objects of national concern, it is time to enter upon a specific exposition of the Art Collections at South Kensington.

It should first be clearly understood that the Art Museum has no connection with the various other collections grouped with it—the Educational Museum, the Museums of Patent Inventions, of Animal Produce, &c., which, as has been explained on previous occasions, are distinct and separate collections, having nothing in common except the fact of their temporary juxtaposition under the same roof, and their being administered by the same Department of Government.

There are, however, other national establishments in the metropolis with which our Museum has some analogy, in particular the National Gallery and the British Museum—the one entirely, the other incidentally devoted to the illustration of art; and it will here not be out of place to state, that from the first the acquisitions to the Kensington Museum have been confined to classes of objects not systematically represented in those collections. It is desirable to state this, because an impression has gone forth that the Kensington Museum of Art and the British Museum were in opposition, competing with each other for the same class of objects. It is, however, scarcely necessary to say that this has never been the case, and that the officers of the respective institutions have always acted in concert whenever any occasion for the acquisition of specimens interesting to both establishments has arisen.

The National Gallery at present occupies a well-defined ground with which the Art Museum is little likely to interfere. This institution confines itself to the collection of paintings as monuments of fine

art only, while it may be observed in passing, by an anomalous arrangement, the Print Room of the British Museum takes possession of the drawings and cartoons of ancient masters which have served for the production of pictures. The scope of our own Museum does, however, to a certain extent, approximate to that of both these institutions, and one or more instances of this approximation may with propriety be now adduced. In the first place the decorative works of great painters executed in embellishment of architecture or furniture may be specified. As far as this important branch can be illustrated by means of full-sized copies from fresco or other paintings, or reduced drawings of works *in situ*, and likewise by the original sketches and designs of artists for such works, the work is now being done at Kensington, where already a very extensive series is exhibited. Again, the Print Room of the British Museum contains an inestimable treasure of engravings, which, from want of space, it is impossible to exhibit; but there is one section even here, which obviously falls within the province of the Kensington Museum—it is that of engravings of an ornamental or decorative character, the literally-innumerable engraved designs of industrial artists of every speciality, of goldsmiths, armourers, watch-makers, enamellers, embroiderers, cabinetmakers, house-decorators, &c.; these had never been adequately collected at the Print Room, because the scheme of that establishment was to illustrate the history and development of engraving as an art, and not ornamental design exemplified by engravings. In the space of a few months a collection in this speciality numbering several thousand specimens has been got together at Kensington, and a more numerous collection than is probably visible in any other public museum is already arranged and exhibited in glazed frames. These illustrations are adduced to show that the Art Museum, whilst being legitimately developed on its own methodical plan,

is incidentally remedying shortcomings in categories which the more limited scope of existing public institutions has obliged them to neglect. Thus the nation is not forming collections in duplicate, and moreover several important categories are now, for the first time, represented in any public museum of this or any other country.

It is not easy to enumerate, in any logical order, the various sections which the Collection comprises. The variety of objects of use and decoration, which may properly be termed works of art, is almost infinite, and the greatest difficulty is experienced, not only in endeavouring to group them into definite categories, but likewise in settling the relation of those divisions to each other. The classification hitherto adopted has moreover of necessity been provisional, because the Collection has been a growing one, developing itself to a considerable extent irregularly, as the opportunities for the acquisition of specimens has admitted.

The substantive design of this Museum may be defined as *the illustration, by actual monuments, of all art which is materially embodied or expressed in objects of utility*. This comprehensive scheme obviously includes works of all periods and countries, from the earliest dawnings of art in classical antiquity to the elaborate products of contemporary art-industry; and a historical or chronological arrangement has been especially, though not exclusively, adhered to. It is not desirable to enter on a lengthy disquisition as to scientific methods of arrangement, and a free description of some of the leading sections of the Collection will alone be possible within the limits of this lecture. It will be as well previously to state, however, that in a chronological point of view few of the specimens hitherto acquired actually go further back than the commencement of the middle ages, and for this reason, that in the British Museum the nation already possesses a most extensive collection illus-

trative of the arts of antiquity; not, it is true, selected or arranged from the point of view of art, but still mainly valuable in that aspect. We have, then, taken up the chain of development at the point where it has been left by that institution, and which may be broadly said to end with the era of Pagan antiquity.

The decorative arts in immediate alliance with architecture are of the highest importance, and objects of an architectural nature in stone, marble, wood, terracotta, bronze, &c., under the general head of sculpture, may very properly be first noticed. An enumeration of a few of the leading specimens will, perhaps, be the best mode of illustration. On entering the new galleries now being arranged, the visitor will remark the great chimney-piece in carved stone from Antwerp. A beautiful cast of the fine quattrocento chimney-piece from Padua, in the Soulages Collection, is erected in the main building, and at the present time a magnificent specimen of the same period is, it is hoped, on its way from Italy. In the same room is one of the finest and most important works extant of the Florentine sculptor, Luca della Robbia; this is the large altar-piece in glazed terracotta representing the Adoration of the Kings. In the iron building is the elaborate stone *retable* or altar-piece from Troyes, in Champagne, and the equally beautiful one in carved oak from the cathedral of St. Bavon, at Ghent; a door, with its architrave, pediment, &c., in marqueterie, from the Hotel de Ville at Antwerp; the complete carved oak panelling of a room, from an ancient house at Exeter. Minor specimens, fragments of architectural works, are, of course, too numerous to specify.

These objects are, moreover, illustrated with drawings, casts, photographs, &c. of similar specimens *in situ*, or in other collections, and already many interesting original designs by ancient artists have been acquired. Among them may be speci-

fied the ancient drawings of a chimney-piece, and a garden fountain or pavilion at old Nonsuch Palace, attributed to Zuccherò; an original working drawing, with plans, sections, &c., of a lofty stone tabernacle for the receptacle of the Host, by a German architect of the fifteenth century, with many others by ancient artists, both painters, sculptors, and architects. In the category of sculpture also may be mentioned a lavatory or domestic fountain in Istrian marble, upwards of ten feet high, a noble work of the beginning of the sixteenth century, brought from Venice, which is about being acquired; and as a work of an architectonic character, the beautiful pavement of the Audience Chamber of the Petrucci Palace at Sienna, composed of majolica tiles exquisitely painted, with an immense variety of arabesque designs, several hundreds of these tiles, all in fact that remained of the pavement, have been acquired.

The numerous collection, which is being continually augmented, of coloured drawings and full-sized copies from fresco and other wall-decorations has been already alluded to.

Mosaics form another well-defined section. Here will be found antique Greek and Roman wall and floor mosaics, important fragments dating from the fifth to the fifteenth century of Italian glass paste mosaics, of which specimens from Milan and Ravenna respectively may be specified, and this section also is well illustrated by original drawings of works *in situ*.

Painted glass is represented by an increasing series of original works. First may be noticed a small window of the highest beauty and historical interest from Torcello, in Italy—this specimen dates from the twelfth century; a large window in three lights, originally brought from Winchester College, one of the very finest examples of English fifteenth century glass; another window, fifteen feet high, in two lights, with tracery complete, from Cologne

Cathedral ; a window, in three divisions, of French early renaissance glass from Normandy ; another in two lights from Belgium ; and one of the finest specimens of modern German glass painting may be seen in a fine window executed at the Royal Glass Painting Establishment at Munich. There are also many specimens of old Flemish and Swiss armorial glass, and the latter class is illustrated in a remarkably interesting manner by upwards of fifty original cartoons and drawings by ancient glass painters of the school of Basle, in many instances signed and dated by the artists : of these a large proportion are framed and exhibited along with the specimens of glass. Like the preceding, this section also is being amply illustrated by original drawings and coloured engravings of existing monuments of the art, arranged in chronological order.

We will now pass to classes of objects of a less monumental character—decorative furniture, coffers, cabinets, chairs, tables, bedsteads, &c., exhibiting as great a diversity of decorative processes as of periods and styles, beginning with the mediæval works of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and descending to the master pieces of modern cabinet-work, acquired from the Universal Exhibitions of 1851 and 1855. It should be remarked that while the Collection remained at Marlborough House the confined space did not allow of any great increase in this section, the specimens being nearly always bulky, but no endeavours are now being spared to make up for former neglect.

The Ceramic section has, on the contrary, from the first been actively developed, and has already conduced in a very marked manner to the advancement in design of British art-pottery. The ancient Italian painted earthenware,—the majolica, so striking and beautiful a development of industrial art, has in particular been sedulously collected, and it is doubtful if at this moment so complete a series exists anywhere else. The art-pottery of Wedg-

wood is likewise well represented, while the beautiful modern works of Minton and other manufacturers in this country, and of Sèvres in France, are illustrated by many of the most costly and extraordinary specimens executed of late years.

Specimens of glass manufactures are scarcely less numerous, and in the instructive products of the ancient glasshouses of Venice the Museum is especially rich. In the section of enamels, one of peculiar interest offering so much that is suggestive to modern art industry, endeavours have been made to get together historical or progressive series of specimens from the earliest development of the art, and many fine and costly examples in this category have been secured.

Of objects which may be generally described as works in métal the Collection comprises probably about fifteen hundred specimens. It would be impossible to specify other than a few of the leading sections. First, goldsmiths' work, comprising decorative plate, all kinds of cups, salvers, chalices, ecclesiastical vessels and utensils, ornamental objects in rare and precious materials, such as agates, crystals, shells, cocoa-nuts, &c., elaborately mounted in gold and silver, make a goodly show.

A collection of knives and forks, spoons, and similar utensils is certainly unique, both as to the number, variety, and beauty of the specimens.

Art-bronzes, especially of the quattro-cento and renaissance periods, form another attractive section, in which many striking works might be specified. Decorative arms and armour, lockwork,—in the latter division, in particular, is an extensive series of richly decorated locks and keys,—damascening, niello-work, and the processes of chasing, engraving, etching on metals, repoussé work, &c. are illustrated in a great variety of objects of use. Here also drawings and coloured photographs from specimens in continental collections have been added in illustration, and a special series of original engravings by

goldsmiths, watch-chasers, armourers, &c. accompany the section of goldsmiths' work.

Of jewellery and objects of personal adornment there are many fine specimens of the mediæval and cinque-cento periods, oriental jewels, and modern examples of the most eminent French jewellers, selected from the 1855 Exhibition.

The section of clocks and watches is still richer, nearly all the remarkable examples from the Bernal Collection having been acquired. Here also should be mentioned a curious series of unique impressions or rubbings from the various ornamental details of watches, and likewise numerous engraved designs by watch-chasers.

Textile fabrics are, perhaps now for the first time, systematically collected in a public museum. This section, so important and so dependant on ornamental design, is rapidly growing, and already numbers several hundred specimens, among which may be mentioned a numerous selection of rich oriental tissues acquired from the Exhibition of 1851; ancient European examples of stuffs, lace, &c., of every description and period are also by no means wanting. Finally, although other equally interesting categories must of necessity be left unnoticed, a section which has just been originated deserves a few remarks: it is that of the ornamentation of books. An endeavour is here being made to get together a systematic series of initial letters, vignettes, title-pages, and every description of illuminated and typographical ornaments employed in the decoration of books, from the earliest period of the middle ages to the present day, and likewise of ornamental bindings. Already a collection, calculated to be of great practical use to publishers, book illustrators, binders, &c., has been accumulated; and it is intended, as soon as space and opportunity will allow, to exhibit every specimen. Several hundred cuttings from ancient illuminated manu-

scripts, which have been cut up at various times by ignorant possessors, from the smallest initial letter to the splendid pages of grand choral books blazing with gold and colours, are already acquired, and here alone will be found a mine of mediæval ornamentation of great value to the student. Of the bindings of books there are specimens of the early monastic brass-bound and oak-boarded volumes; the exquisite "Grolier" style; and many specimens of the costly and elaborate productions of the present day.

From this enumeration it will be evident that very considerable progress has been made towards the formation of a collection worthy of the nation; indeed, the chief work has been the acquisition of specimens. It is to be regretted, however, that this work did not commence earlier; the nation inevitably follows the lead of individuals, but unfortunately it has also been the last competitor in a field in which other countries have long laboured. In an economical point of view this is to be regretted, inasmuch as for nearly every work of art now acquired the nation pays in pounds, where, a few years ago even, the price was shillings. Works of art of former periods have, generally speaking, within the last few years risen in pecuniary value in a ratio, which will scarcely be credited by those not conversant with the records of sale-rooms. This advance in value, though of course much more extraordinary in some categories than in others, is still very general, and has arisen from causes which it will be interesting to specify:—First, all ancient works of art are obviously limited in number, and therefore, as mercantile commodities they do not come within the usual laws of supply and demand; the supply, contrary to the usual rule, gradually decreasing, whilst the demand is augmenting in a much quicker ratio. The effect of this, of course, need not be specified. Accident and natural decay are slowly but surely reducing the number of ancient works of art,

whilst the withdrawal from circulation of specimens by their permanent location in public museums is a far more effectual process ; and one which, such is the activity in this direction throughout Europe, is becoming sensibly felt. But more than this, these very museums have been the means of stimulating a host of wealthy amateurs, who, unfettered by the delays and difficulties impeding all governmental action, undeterred by any fears on the score of responsibility, step in, and, by the power of ready money, triumphantly beat out of the field the unlucky curators of our public collections.

During the period of the exhibition of our Collection at Marlborough House even, several specialities there for the first time represented became favourite objects of research by a new race of connoisseurs : the dealers followed every movement of the taste or caprice of their clients with the keen eye of gain, and the specimens in these classes, as a matter of course, have speedily doubled or trebled in value ; thus the nation, as it were, becomes its own principal opponent. Economical reasons of this kind, however, are really unworthy of serious discussion. This great and wealthy nation can readily afford to spend even five times the pittance it now disburses on works of art ; and it will be a national disgrace to us if we are content to allow our collections to remain, as is at present the case, inferior to those of many a third-rate continental State. Why should not England aim at being first here, as in every other branch of national progress ?

As yet it is a mere question of money and rightly directed administrative action. England may yet form the noblest art collection the world has ever seen ; soon, however, this may become impossible, in a few years even it will be too late, and a tantalizing record of lost opportunities will then alone remain as a reproach to the men of to-day.

Specific instances, in any number, might be adduced in support of what has been now ad-

vanced; time, however, will only allow of the briefest possible allusion to one or two: the rise in value in one class, in which our Collection fortunately possesses a most important series, has been so sudden and remarkable as to be worth special notice. Four or five years ago the most beautiful specimens of Italian majolica ware might have been purchased at dealers' shops and London auctions at from a few shillings to at most a few, say five or ten, pounds at the highest; whilst in Italy a few scudi or dollars would purchase the finest piece. Now, these same pieces will sell for twenty, fifty, a hundred, two hundred pounds; nay, I dare scarcely place a limit to the value of the finest specimens. As an instance, the most seemingly extravagant price ever heard of until then was given in Italy, not four years ago, for a fine majolica plate; after being refused by dealers and amateurs without number, on account of its supposed exorbitant price—twelve pounds English,—this long coveted specimen was purchased by a French dealer: this year this same piece was publicly sold by auction in Paris for the sum of 450*l.*, and brought in triumph to this country by its purchaser, a well-known English amateur. And this Museum has, in times not long gone by, made numerous acquisitions in the same direction, which if now brought to the hammer would yield a similarly fabulous increase. The Bernal Collection, which two short years ago was offered intact to Government, and declined, for 40,000*l.*, and subsequently realised upwards of 60,000*l.* by public auction, would now probably be worth 100,000*l.*; and the purchases made for the Museum of Art on that occasion, as they were the choicest treasures of the Collection, would, without doubt, yield a still higher rate of profit. It may be said, and it is indeed often objected, that these prices merely result from fictitious and temporary causes; that the extravagant caprice of rich men is no rule for the expenditure of public

money. It is true, that it is the duty of public servants to have a strict care that they do not administer public funds wastefully; but it is evident that if the nation is ever to possess works of art, it must acquire them in open market against all the world. But it is not true that, generally speaking, the rise of value in all ancient works of art is of a merely temporary nature; on the contrary, it is all but certain that the advance will go on systematically, and that the present prices will be outstripped in an increasing ratio. Works of art may, in truth, be considered as a circulating medium. Fluctuations in national taste may, it is true, occasion temporary periods of depreciation, or of undue increase in the pecuniary value of specific classes; but, on the whole, sudden convulsions will be as rare here as in any other system. And there is this additional security, that really noble works of art have an innate value above and independent of temporary caprice. This value will always be in proportion to the real taste and knowledge of the epoch, and to the number and wealth of connoisseurs. Now, both these latter elements are on the increase, and will in all probability advance far beyond their present status; so that a period doubtless will come when even the present time will be looked back to as a golden age of opportunity.

It is clear then that not a day is to be lost, and that in energetic and unremitting endeavours, the directors of our public collections are rendering a national service, which will one day be recognised.

It is too often at present a hard and thankless task, often their demands are met with a doubtful "*Cui bono?*" and the ardent official is made to feel, in spite of his conviction of the national importance of his request, almost as though he were pleading for a personal favour. At this moment an acquisition of the very highest importance is wavering in the balance—the well known Soulages Collection, brought

to this country by the patriotic zeal of a number of private individuals, may still be acquired for the nation, or the country may in a few weeks witness its dispersion under the hammer, and the acquisition of the finest specimens by foreign museums and collectors; surely we may hope that this one will not be a crowning sin of omission to be added to the long catalogue of lost opportunities.

But besides the permanent acquisitions to the property of the nation, the Museum is enriched by a constant succession of works of art, contributed on loan by private Collectors. This system, although not entirely without previous example in this country, the British Institution having successfully carried out this practice as regards ancient pictures from the beginning of the present century, is a novelty as respects institutions supported by the State, and one not as yet imitated in any other country. Nevertheless the guarantee which stable and responsible Government institutions were best able to offer to possessors of works of art, was sure to remove their chief objection to parting with their treasures, and as might have been expected, this system of receiving objects on loan for temporary exhibition to the public has been entirely successful. The number of interesting works contributed from all classes of collectors has been limited only by the amount of space that could be allotted for their reception; and following the example of Her Majesty the Queen, who has been alike the earliest and the principal contributor, noble and wealthy connoisseurs have by voluntary offers, rather anticipated than awaited application from us. It is intended as soon as the requisite space can be obtained, to apportion a separate room or division of a gallery to the reception of loans, and there is no doubt but that as soon as this is done, collectors will vie with each other in patriotic liberality to the public, and that a constantly varied selection of the treasures of art in private hands will be

always on view. It is not too much to say, that the great art gathering, recently brought to a close at Manchester, was rendered practicable mainly by the previous successful carrying out of the system of loans at Marlborough House.

Original specimens, whether permanently acquired or temporarily contributed, however, do not form the only attractions of the Collection. Modern processes of reproduction have rendered practicable the most extraordinary and faithful imitations of original works, and without mingling together originals and copies in bewildering confusion, it is intended that these facilities for the reproduction of notable objects in foreign collections or elsewhere should be developed on the very widest scale.

Objects in relief are reproducible by improved processes of moulding in plaster, and likewise by the marvellous agency of the electro-deposit system, by which imitations of works in metal may be produced in absolute fac-simile. Photography, likewise, is largely available and in the beautiful series of copies from the works in precious materials preserved in the collection of the Louvre, and now exhibited in the Museum, may be seen an example of the extraordinary accuracy and truth, amounting indeed almost to illusion, which may be attained by making use of this art in conjunction with the technical resources of water-colour painting. Casts, electro-type copies, and coloured photographs will be procured, if possible, from all European collections; and an interesting undertaking, and one which may probably be attempted, would be the grouping together those copies from each continental collection, so that the untravelled student might study and enjoy at his leisure at home, the accumulated art riches of the world.

Another use of reproductions, which has been already alluded to, is to serve as illustrations to the analogous original specimens in our own Collection, near which they would be placed. Judicious illus-

tration of this kind cannot fail to be most useful. And, lastly, provincial Museums of Art which, it is to be hoped, will soon arise on all hands, will be largely dependent on reproduction, in default of original examples, which they can never hope to obtain to an adequate extent. This fact is even now seriously had in mind, and a store of valuable materials for distribution to the provinces is being daily gathered together. Time will not permit of any detailed consideration of this aspect of our subject; the question of provincial museums would alone furnish ample materials for a special lecture.

The Secretary of this Department, in his opening lecture, has, moreover, described the principal steps taken in this direction. When the time for increased activity in the field arrives, the Department of Science and Art will doubtless be enabled, through the collections and the administrative machinery of the Art Museum, to afford effectual aid and support to local endeavours. Already for the last three years a collection of considerable extent, being, in fact, a complete epitome of the Museum, has been circulated in all the principal towns of the three kingdoms, and has materially assisted in paving the way for further progress. Provincial Museums may obtain duplicate specimens from our collections at half their original cost, and a systematic plan of sending down rare and costly examples from the central Museum, on temporary loan, to localities where the several specialities of manufacture or design may be benefited by the study of such works, is in full operation.

It now only remains to say a few words on the general aspect of the National Art Collections in the metropolis, in respect to their present and ultimate relation to each other. The Museum at South Kensington, as the most recently created, may without arrogating any superiority either of direction or design, naturally be presumed to have the greatest share of that expansive spirit of progress, that prac-

tical activity which new undertakings naturally engender. It has had the advantage, moreover, in commencing from the first with a definite object in view, but it has ever been regarded as but a portion of a great national whole, an integral part of an imperial and universal art collection, which, dealing with all our national acquisitions in art, irrespective of previous interests or arbitrary schemes, sanctioned though they may be by the weight of years and manifold authorities, will one day consolidate the now scattered and disconnected treasures into a noble unity worthy of this great country. It may be found advisable to consolidate all our national art acquisitions in actual juxtaposition, or a well ordered scheme may be devised, admitting of a logical classification or theoretical union, whilst an actual severance as respects locality may be allowed to continue; but, however accident or the mature decision of the nation and its rulers may determine, it is hoped that, whenever this great work is seriously undertaken, the South Kensington Museum will be found to be a well-ordered and coherent institution, ready to merge itself without disruption into a grander whole, or else worthy to become that central nucleus around which other establishments may be aggregated. Meanwhile its mission is present and immediate utility, the active collection of works of art, and the complete and unrestricted rendering of them available to the public.

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